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ABSTRACT

A study of 10 freshman composition argumentative textbooks shows that there is a common core, grounded in but not dependent on classical rhetoric (Aristotelian rhetoric in particular). A cursory glance--which is all that many teachers can afford to give such books--might suggest they are all clones. But such is not the case. The authors forefront different aspects of a common core and usually find other ideas to add. More specifically, the 10 textbooks call the student's attention to 3 classical modes of supporting a thesis: pathos, logos, and ethos. The texts also: (1) borrow the Ancient stasis theory; (2) avoid one-upmanship in their theories of argument; (3) do not treat the technical aspects of logic; (4) emphasize research writing; and (5) are process-based in their teaching of writing. The textbooks differ in the type and range of readings they anthologize. Further, they give decidedly different weight to various aspects of the writing process. One might give particular emphasis to classical rhetoric, another to critical thinking, still another to audience analysis. On the whole these 10 texts might be too intimidating or overwhelming for some freshmen; their length and complexity is worth noting. These texts are also not particularly practical in terms of how they would correlate to major writing assignments. On the whole, however, they offer solid approaches to writing, diverse yet complementary. (Textbooks are listed.) (TB)

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Textbooks on argumentative writing display much agreement, though each has own slant

An examination of 10 textbooks reveals how they converge and diverge in their approaches to teaching argumention

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About six years ago, a colleague who primarily taught literature stopped by my office searching for a particular composition textbook. When she asked if I kept such things, I pointed her to a long row of textbooks. She shook her head, looking pained. "That's depressing," she lamented. "So much time, energy, and paper wasted on saying the same thing over and over and over." She found her book and left.

I was, on one hand, moderately annoyed that she failed to appreciate the possibility that these textbooks made contributions. On the other hand, somewhere in my heart I felt she was right. Too often textbooks claim to draw on the latest research yet fail to offer anything different. Indeed, the market is conservative; more than one publisher's representative has told me how difficult it is for a textbook proposal to be accepted if it stands out too much from the crowd.

So is there any diversity? I examined ten offerings of one breed of textbook: the college-level text that focuses on argumentation. (See list on page 2.) Such texts are often used in either freshman or advanced writing courses. My primary goal here is not so much to evaluate these books as to indicate major trends and differences. Such information might help experienced teachers determine which of these texts might be most appropriate for their classrooms and those teaching argument for the first time see what their options are.

My sampling procedure was not scientific, but my pool was built around recently published texts (the oldest from 1991) and included both first editions (four texts) and revised editions (six) of more established books. I selected textbooks with a clear, distinct focus on argument writing; usually, the title alone indicated such a focus, but the authors' introductory material also identified the primary intent of the texts. The authors did not specify the course level for which their books were intended, but they made it clear—with the possible exception of Missimer—that these texts

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were meant to be used in college-level writing courses. I attempted to examine textbooks from a range of publishers, although apparently some publishers are particularly committed to argument texts.

My analysis of these ten suggests that, although argumentation textbooks tend to share a common basis, each text manages to offer its own slant. Even though on first glance these books seem to cover the same ideas in the same way, each author finds a way—in both presentation style and content—to offer a unique approach based on shared assumptions and goals.

Common features of argumentation textbooks

Below is an overview of major trends. Not every textbook follows each trend, but the majority do.

Pathos, logos, ethos. Six of the textbooks directly call students' attention to the three classical ways of supporting a thesis: emotional appeals (pathos), logic (logos), and the credibility and character of the speaker/writer (ethos). This approach is one of the most conspicuous borrowings from ancient rhetoric, and often the texts use the classical terminology.

Stasis theory: Also borrowed from the ancients, stasis theory categorizes the key questions or concerns involved in an issue, such as the nature of X, the causes of X, and what to do about X. Seven of the ten textbooks discuss such a system. Some texts seem to draw on a related scheme—Aristotle's common topics—rather than stasis theory, but here I use terminology found in several of the books. Often, the authors suggest using stasis theory as a means of exploring paper topics (e.g., Barnet/Bedau), while other authors devote entire chapters to explaining how each aspect of stasis theory can result in a different type of argument (e.g., Ramage/Bean, Corbett).

Avoidance of "one upsmanship": While classical rhetoric was often a gladiatorial affair, all ten textbooks explicitly call students' attention to the fact that argument does not have to be a me-against-you duel; rather, argument is portrayed as inquiry and critical thinking, even as a way of building rather than dividing communities. In some ways, this is one of the most significant features of the texts; it affects not only presentation style but content. Most textbooks offer more than lip service to this "kinder, gentler" conception of argument. Crusius/Channell, for instance, includes a chapter on negotiating differences among people involved in a debate, and Wood has a section on psychotherapist Carl Rogers' notion of empathetic listening.

Avoidance of technical discussions of formal logic: For many people, the driest aspect of argumentation theory might well be the technical explanations of formal logic—of syllogisms, minor and major premises, induction, deduction, and the conglomeration of circles and boxes representing these concepts. While formal logic suits some philosophy or mathematics courses, students and teachers in a writing course can become so focused on abstract logic that little is transferred to students' own writing. Rarely, however, do the textbooks give sustained attention to formal logic; most only touch on it (Corbett is an exception).

Toulmin logic: While formal logic is not emphasized, one modern system of logic is: Toulmin's framework of claims, supports, warrants, backing, rebuttal, and qualifiers. Toulmin's model is not necessarily easier to comprehend, but when compared to the quasi-mathematical system of formal logic, it is more typical of actual rather than ideal arguments. Seven of the texts cover Toulmin, with some using it as a major feature (e.g., Ramage/Bean, Rottenberg, Wood).

Researched writing: With the exception of Corbett and Missimer, all texts have extensive discussions of researched arguments, covering topics such as documentation, evaluating sources, and using the library. The discussions are straightforward, conventional, and normally not greatly stimulating. It is worth noting, though, that the textbooks reflect a general trend in the profession away from the perfunctory research paper and toward research assignments that contribute meaningfully to the student writer's purpose.

Process based: As one would hope, virtually all of the texts alert students to the writing-as-a-process model, and they avoid doing so in just an obligatory way. Only Corbett and Missimer are possible exceptions because of their focuses on, respectively, classical rhetoric and a conception of critical thinking that does not draw on composition research.

Audience based: All texts (but especially Bradbury/Quinn) focus on audience awareness and analysis, even more so than do general composition textbooks. Audience awareness is essential to argument, given the intent to affect readers' opinions. While not a new concept, this focus complements the process approach, which sometimes rewards students for completing the process even if the product is ineffective in terms of the intended audience.

Reading/Writing connections: While most writing textbooks

10 Argumentation Textbooks for College Writing Courses

Barnet, Sylvan, and Hugo Bedau. *Current Issues and Enduring Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings*. 3rd ed. Boston: St. Martin's, 1993.

Bradbury, Nancy Mason, and Arthur Quinn. *Audiences and Intentions: A Book of Arguments*. 2nd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1994.

Corbett, Edward P. J. *The Elements of Reasoning*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1991.

Crusius, Timothy W., and Carolyn E. Channell. *The Aims of Argument: A Rhetoric and Reader*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995.

Gage, John T. *The Shape of Reason: Argumentative Writing in College*. 2nd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1991.

Missimer, C. A. *Good Arguments: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Ramage, John D., and John C. Bean. *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings*. 3rd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1995.

Rottenberg, Annette T. *Elements of Argument: A Text and Reader*. 4th ed. Boston: St. Martin's, 1994.

Vesterman, William. *Reading and Writing Short Arguments*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1994.

Wood, Nancy V. *Perspectives on Argument*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

use sample readings to an extent, argument texts are distinct in that readings play a central, rather than supplemental, role. Indeed, argument texts are often as much anthologies as rhetoric texts (Vesterman, in fact, is much closer to being an anthology).

It is not clear why argumentation texts rely so much on readings as compared to general writing texts, but I suspect several factors are at work. In particular, sample essays are vital for argument texts because such books tend to have more sophisticated treatments of writing than do general writing texts; thus, the readings help teachers translate abstract principles into actual practice.

Some texts (e.g., Rottenberg, Barnet/Bedau, Ramage/Bean) are available in shorter editions with fewer readings, but note the following about the principal editions:

- all 10 have sample readings;
- 8 (all but Corbett and Rottenberg) have a section explicitly devoted to reading critically;
- 9 (all but Vesterman) have readings mixed in with the chapters that tell students how to argue effectively;
- 7 (all but Missimer, Gage, and Corbett) include an anthology of essays clustered around assorted themes.

Usually, the readings are current rather than classic, with most written in the last twenty years. Also, except for Ramage/Bean, Wood, Crusius/Channell, and Barnet/Bedau, the texts make little use of student papers.

Divergence: How the texts differ

Given all these similarities, it might appear there is little to distinguish one text from another. I found, however, two major ways in which these books differ. These two general areas of divergence are so far-reaching that they result in substantial variation.

Range of readings: Some classic essays appear often, such as King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and Swift's "A Modest Proposal." However, the ten texts do more than provide ten different covers for the same canon of essays. Since most of the textbooks rely on recent arguments and contemporary issues, there is not much chance the authors will have yet determined which recent essays are "must" reading.

The texts also vary in terms of the issues covered by the sample readings.

As seen in the inset box, there is a range of topics covered by the seven texts having an anthology section wherein readings are grouped around themes. And while some general issues are frequently used (such as censorship and free speech), the texts tend to use different sub-issues (such as music censorship) to explore the general issue.

Distinctive focus: While the textbooks share many assumptions, not all assumptions receive equal treatment. One author might forefront classical rhetoric, while another might focus on Toulmin logic. Also, each author brings in other assumptions to complement this shared core of assumptions; Barnet/Bedau, for instance, highlights the connection between argument and critical thinking.

Below is an summary of how each book, arranged alphabetically, achieves a characteristic focus.

- *Barnet/Bedau*: emphasizes critical thinking and the analysis of arguments of others.
- *Bradbury/Quinn*: emphasizes audience and contexts; includes more "classical" readings than any other text reviewed, with special attention to literature and flawed or deceitful samples; only text to offer a section devoted to ethics (not ethos) of argument.
- *Corbett*: uses a succinct (127 pages) explanation based primarily on classical rhetoric and formal logic.
- *Crusius/Channell*: centers around four sequentially-linked types of arguments (inquiry, convincing, persuasion, negotiation).
- *Gage*: next to Corbett, draws the most on classical rhetoric but focuses on argument as inquiry (also gives ample attention to stylistic concerns).
- *Missimer*: emphasizes criti-

Common Topics & Sub-Topics in 7 Argument Anthologies

Topic:	Number of texts using topic to group essays:
censorship vs. free speech	*6*
general censorship	4
racist language	3
pornography	1
sexist language	1
censorship of music	1
strikes as free speech	1
discrimination & bigotry	*5*
sexual harassment	3
pay equity for women	2
women in combat	2
general racism	2
gay rights	2
affirmative action	1
environmental issues	*5*
relationship w/ environment	3
endangered species	2
global warming	1
health & sex issues	*5*
mercy killing	3
AIDS	2
national health care	2
gender & family roles	*5*
married women's names	1
sex, gender, family	1
roles of men & women	1
feminism	1
family	1
defining civil rights	*4*
animal rights	3
civil disobedience	2
children's rights	1
crime & violence	*4*
legalization of drugs	2
treatment of criminals	1
death penalty	1
bombing of Hiroshima	1
wealth & poverty	*4*
homelessness	4
distribution of wealth	1
education issues	*4*
education in general	2
defining literary canons	1
bilingualism in school	1
abortion	1

cal thinking; provides the only approach not based on the composition or rhetoric disciplines (though used in composition courses, it is primarily found in philosophy courses); places the least emphasis on reading samples; probably the most accessible discussions and readings.

• *Ramage/Bean*: has several chapters that use the enthymeme and stasis theory as a foundation.

• *Rottenberg*: modifies and simplifies Toulmin as the basis of presentation (also one of few to intentionally include reading samples that are flawed).

• *Vesterman*: like Corbett, offers a succinct treatment, but with less emphasis on classical rhetoric; focuses on short reading samples.

• *Wood*: stresses both individual and group styles of argument (the only text with considerable attention to cultural and gender styles).

Final observations

My synthesis indicates there is a common core to argumentation textbooks, a core *grounded in* but not *dependent on* classical rhetoric (Aristotelian rhetoric in particular). A cursory glance—which is all that many teachers can afford the dozens of writing textbooks available—might suggest these books are clones. But such is not the case. The authors forefront different aspects of this common core and usually find other ideas to add.

So do we simply conclude that everything is beautiful in its own way? Clearly, a classroom context—for instance, the student population, the teacher's approach, and course level—will determine which texts would be most useful. Still, while each might have its own niche and target population, I believe that, for freshman composition anyway, some texts are likely to be more beneficial than others. Since my purpose here is not to evaluate individual texts, I will instead make general observations.

First, the length and complexity of most texts are intimidating. While many freshman composition texts seem lacking in substance, most of these ten are the other extreme—lengthy, abstract discussions that could overwhelm and confuse many freshmen. Not counting indexes, the average length of these textbooks is about 500 pages. Obviously, the texts usually include more sample readings than a teacher could assign, but often it would be difficult to skip any of the informational chapters since these build upon one another. By no means am I advocating the elimination of abstract ideas and long reading assignments; however, I found a reason to be concerned about the accessibility of most of these texts for freshmen—such as those whom I teach—who have writing and reading backgrounds that are not particularly rich. The authors have a fine line to walk: they need to provide substance, not fluff, while managing to avoid overwhelming students. Given such factors, most argument texts might best be used in courses beyond the freshman level.

Second, many of the texts are not greatly practical in terms of how they would correlate with major writing assignments. Most texts devote several lengthy chapters to the various aspects of argument, such as one text which moves from claims, to definition, to warrants, to style, and then to induction, deduction, and logical fallacies. A teacher would likely assign writing along the way, but does he/she just hold students accountable for claims and definitions if that is how far they are in the text? Some texts, especially Barnet/Bedau and Crusius/Channel, avoid this problem by organization most chapters around genres of argument. Practical curricular matters can be handled in other ways, but most of the textbooks seem conducive to a piecemeal approach to argumentation, covering one sub-skill or theoretical component at a time.

As a whole, however, the texts offer solid approaches that are diverse yet complementary, based on widely-held assumptions while featuring the authors' own perspectives. Undoubtedly, other argument texts are worthy of notice, and I invite readers to send me bibliographic information (along with any comments) so other textbooks could be noted in a future issue.

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